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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

30 April 1986

LIBYA: What if Qadhafi is Ousted? [REDACTED]

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Summary

Qadhafi's removal would result in an intense--and possibly bloody--power struggle among several competing factions. The most likely outcome would be a regime that curtailed Libya's worldwide support for revolutionary causes but remained opposed to many US policies in the Middle East and Africa. Its receptivity to developing a more constructive relationship with Washington would be tempered at least initially by the need to dispel the inevitable suspicions at home and abroad that the US put it in power. A less likely scenario involves an extremist-dominated government that could become an even greater threat to US interests than the Qadhafi regime. Such extremists would be more willing than Qadhafi to target US personnel and facilities directly in terrorist operations. Although the extremists are opposed to Soviet ideology, they might feel compelled to try to obtain Moscow's protection if they perceived themselves under strong US pressure. In return, Moscow might demand increased access to Libyan air and naval facilities and push Tripoli to adopt policies in support of Soviet objectives in the Middle East and elsewhere. [REDACTED]

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In our judgment, Qadhafi's position in Libya remains insecure. Although the security forces remain loyal, the armed forces are seriously alienated from the regime. Moreover, last fall infighting between two key pillars of the regime--the radical revolutionary committees and the Qadhafa tribe--further decreased Qadhafi's already narrow base of support. This erosion

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of support has occurred as mismanaged socialist economic policies, economic constraints imposed by the soft oil market, and wasteful spending in support of radical causes worldwide are seriously degrading the relatively high standard of living that once was regarded by most Libyans as among the principal fruits of Qadhafi's revolution. These developments, in our view, combined with widely resented abuses of power by Qadhafi's extremist supporters, are creating the political climate that encourages plotting by Qadhafi's many opponents and increases their chances of penetrating his elaborate security network. [REDACTED]

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US military action against Libya appears to have increased the uncertain climate in Tripoli. The perception of a superpower attacking a small country, and the civilian casualties probably have generated some popular support for the regime on nationalistic grounds. In our view, however, this support is not as great as might have been expected, a judgment supported by [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] In addition, [REDACTED] even after US airstrikes on Libya in March and April, there were significant incidents of insubordination or outright mutiny by individual Libyan military units. [REDACTED] Qadhafi may make senior officers--he already has arrested the Air Force Commander--scapegoats for the poor Libyan showing against US forces. Such a crackdown, in our view, probably would aggravate antiregime sentiment in the officer corps. It would also suggest that despite his attempts to rally popular support, Qadhafi is still reliant on repression to maintain his position. [REDACTED]

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The Key Players

In our judgment, four key groups have the capability of deposing Qadhafi. These groups also would be the principal players in trying to take power in the event Qadhafi is assassinated or killed during a US airstrike. The contenders include:

- Qadhafi's relatives and fellow tribesmen, assigned to many important military and security posts, who are concerned that his declining political fortunes threaten their position in Libya. Their dissatisfaction probably has increased as a result of the factional infighting last fall, when the Revolutionary Committees extended their power at the tribe's expense. [REDACTED]
- Qadhafi's fellow tribesmen have been advising him over the past two years to curtail his revolutionary programs as a means of rebuilding his popular support and preserving their position.
- Libyan nationalists in the armed forces, who would be motivated by their loss of political influence to the revolutionary committees and their resentment at Qadhafi's establishment of a Peoples Militia as a

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counterweight. [redacted] the nationalists also oppose many of Qadhafi's aggressive foreign policies which, in their view, are unrelated to Libyan interests.

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- Exiled Libyan dissidents, who oppose Qadhafi because his revolution has deprived them of their wealth, status, and political influence in Libya. Their first attempt in May 1984 to establish a network inside Libya capable of attacking Qadhafi demonstrated their determination to try to exploit his domestic difficulties. Their failure to mount a serious paramilitary operation since then, and their relative inactivity outside Libya for almost a year, has undermined their credibility, however.

- Fanatics in the revolutionary committees, who might depose Qadhafi in opposition to one of his periodic tactical shifts toward moderation or to prevent him from curbing their influence. [redacted]

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[redacted] in the past Qadhafi has gone out of his way to justify to the ideologues his appearance of moderation in the pursuit of radical objectives. At present, however, the Revolutionary Committees dominate many key positions in the regime and apparently are quite supportive of Qadhafi. [redacted]

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Instability Ahead

None of these groups appears to us to have the strength to quickly consolidate its position on its own, even in the event of a preemptive move by one of them. The Qadhafa tribe is relatively small and would need to coopt its rivals or to expand its base of support to maintain control. There are also indications of personal rivalries over assuming Qadhafi's mantle, which would seriously weaken the Qadhafa's ability to carry the day. Qadhafi's extensive security precautions militate against a coup by nationalist military officers that would immediately eliminate Qadhafi's tribesmen or the revolutionary committees as political actors. Libyan exiles have been unable to build an extensive reliable support network inside the country because of long absence from Libya. The revolutionary committees would likely encounter deep-rooted popular resentment over their role in orchestrating Qadhafi's brutal efforts over the past 10 years to suppress dissent. [redacted]

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In our view, these weaknesses portend instability in the immediate post-Qadhafi period. Available evidence does not indicate anyone of Qadhafi's stature able and in a position to take control. Even some form of collegial rule involving elements from all four factions would only serve as a facade for intense behind-the-scenes maneuvering. [redacted]

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The radicals and the exiles would be in the worst position to survive such infighting, in our view. Available evidence

indicates that despite their considerable power, the revolutionary committees have insufficient arms, equipment, and training to maintain power by oppression. Moreover, the leader of the radical faction, Qadhafi's deputy Abd al-Salam Jallud, is reported to have little support in the armed forces. He also is unlikely to generate much popular support because of his longstanding reputation for corruption and debauchery. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the exiles' popular support within Libya is limited, and we believe that only a successful attack on Qadhafi would provide the exiles the leverage needed to have a significant role in a post Qadhafi regime. [REDACTED]

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Implications for the US

The most dangerous outcome from the standpoint of US interests would be the emergence of a regime dominated by revolutionary committee extremists. Such a government probably would be an even greater threat to US interests than Qadhafi.

[REDACTED] these fanatics are encouraging Qadhafi's use of terrorism and subversion and focus on undermining US interests. They almost certainly would exploit their positions in the government to support terrorism and subversion as foreign policy instruments. This would heighten the threat of direct Libyan involvement in terrorist operations against US personnel and facilities, particularly in the Middle East. Any US attempt to counter Libyan aggression, however, could push the regime into Soviet hands. This might open up additional opportunities for Moscow to obtain increased access to Libyan air and naval facilities and to promote a Libyan foreign policy that uses moderate tactics to undermine US interests. [REDACTED]

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In our judgment, any other regime--even one dominated by the Qadhafa tribe--probably would want a more constructive relationship with Washington. We believe that such a new regime's focus on building popular support would require bringing order to Qadhafi's chaotic system of government, curtailing costly foreign adventures, and redressing popular socio-economic grievances. The need to promote and revise economic priorities would require the new government to improve its international image--particularly by reducing Libyan involvement in revolutionary causes worldwide--to facilitate access to Western consumer goods, technology, and managerial expertise. This almost certainly would involve approaches to the US. [REDACTED]

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At the same time, such a regime probably would proceed cautiously to allay inevitable suspicions at home and abroad that the US "installed" it in power. Qadhafi's vitriolic 16-year attack on Western values and frequent references to the brutal Italian occupation of Libya during the early 1900s, ensures that no new leadership could survive without demonstrating its independence from Western influence. In addition, existing Islamic currents in Libya probably would reinforce the regime's determination to pursue a nonaligned foreign policy, particularly

[REDACTED]

during a time of domestic political turmoil. Any emphasis by the regime on traditional Islamic values would be intended to build support among Libyans who inevitably would look to Islam to provide a sense of personal security in their daily lives. [REDACTED]

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In our view, the nonaligned and Islamic affinities of the new regime would result in continuing opposition to US-sponsored peace initiatives. Such a regime also probably would remain involved in areas where traditional Libyan political and economic interests are engaged, such as in Tunisia, Niger, Sudan, and Chad. [REDACTED]

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Moscow's capability to influence a Libyan succession would depend on which groups came to the fore. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Moscow's extensive and longstanding training of Libyan military personnel and their 1,500-2,000 man military advisory contingent in Libya point to greater Soviet influence with nationalist officers and Qadhafi tribesmen in the armed forces and security services than with ideologues or exiles. This assessment is supported in part by [REDACTED] the extremists dislike the Soviets and regard Marxism as an impediment to broader acceptance of Qadhafi's own "Green Book" revolutionary philosophy. [REDACTED]

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The Soviets at a minimum probably have used their extensive contacts in military circles to identify Libyan officers most likely to assume key political positions in a post-Qadhafi regime. Moscow thereby probably also has acquired potentially valuable information on these officers' views, leadership skills, and lifestyles to use in its efforts to develop a pro-Soviet faction within the armed forces. Such information, in conjunction with intelligence obtained from established agents the Soviets almost certainly have in place, could help them exploit political uncertainties resulting from Qadhafi's removal. Moscow could use its access to Libyan military personnel and facilities to warn the Libyan regime of a coup if the Soviets deemed a change in government against their interests. [REDACTED]

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Moscow's willingness to use whatever assets it has in Libya to influence the succession is another key unknown. The Soviets might adopt a wait-and-see approach, believing their interests would be preserved in any case by continued Libyan dependence on Soviet military assistance. To strengthen Moscow's hold on this dependency, the Soviets initially might offer additional weaponry to the new regime at concessional rates. The payoff of such an approach could be lessened, however, if, as we expect, West European governments--particularly the French--were willing to help reduce Libyan dependence on Moscow by supplying advanced arms. [REDACTED]

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On balance, we regard Soviet leverage as insufficient to deter any regime not comprising revolutionary committee fanatics from seeking improved relations with Washington. Instead, the new regime probably would try to play off Moscow and Washington in an attempt to maximize the military and economic benefits it needs to survive in power.

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